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OREGON.

AMERICAN PROTECTION TO AMERICAN PIONEERS ;

Or,

SHALL OREGON BE SURRENDERED TO GREAT BRITAIN ?

"Let the fixed policy of our Government be, not to permit Great Britain or any other foreign power to plant a colony or hold dominion over any portion of the people or territory of the United States."—*James K. Polk, Columbia, Tennessee, April 23, 1844.*

This was the frank and patriotic opinion of Governor Polk, expressed before he had any anticipation that he should be called upon to carry it into the administration of the General Government, as the next President of the United States. It is worthy a President of this Union, embracing, in this comprehensive and unequivocal form, the great American questions of the day—our international law and the rights of territory.

The question, Shall Oregon be silently surrendered to Great Britain, or firmly claimed by the United States, is an issue that is mainly to be settled by the result of the election of 1844.

Such a declaration, from such a source, comes at this time with peculiar appropriateness in the enforcement of the truly American doctrine, proclaimed by President Monroe, in his celebrated manifesto, of December 2, 1823, when some of the European Powers were about to interfere to prevent the independence of the South American colonies, viz :

"That while the United States continued neutral and impartial in the contests of the European powers among themselves, it was otherwise in regard to their movements in this hemisphere ; that the United States would consider an attempt on their part to extend their peculiar political systems to any part of the new world as dangerous to our peace and safety ; and that we could not view a voluntary interposition of theirs in the affairs of the new Republics of America with indifference, or in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States."

The firmness of this noble declaration, backed by the sense of the American people, checked the intermeddling of foreign Powers with South America ; and every true American now regards it as a part of the international law of the New World.

The time has arrived for its application, with additional force, to the assumption of Great Britain, that she has a right to found new colonies in North America, in territory not yet occupied. This is, in fact, the whole of the title that Great Britain sets up to Oregon ; and this lies at the bottom of all her diplomacy in the matter of the Northwestern boundary.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, in their report of January 4, 1839, well say of the pretension of Great Britain : "She distinctly puts her claim to Oregon on the ground that it is unoccupied territory, just like Virginia or Massachusetts before she colonized them ; and that, as unoccupied savage territory, she may now colonize the Columbia river ; not that it is part of a colony now possessed by her, but country in which she has a right at this day to found a colony. This pretension the committee deem to be inadmissible, and prejudicial to the rights, the security, and the peace of the United States."

Shall it be met, or shall it be permitted to encroach from a pretension to a right, is now the issue that the American people, through their Government, can no longer evade.

The United States will ask of foreign Powers nothing that is not right, and they will submit to nothing that is wrong. Shall this American doctrine be applied to this American question ; and if we have the right, shall we maintain it ? The people have not thoroughly examined this comparatively new but vastly important question. The impulse must come from them, if our rights are not to be sacrificed in Oregon. Let us, therefore, look at the question, as we would examine the title deeds to our farms.

Have we the right to this territory, and is its value such as to authorize the enforcement of that right ?

The people of the United States desire no territory that may not be justly acquired, and they will claim none that does not justly belong to them. But they will surrender none that does.

No man holds his farm by a clearer title than the United States, by the law of nations, hold title to Oregon. What American farmer will surrender a portion of his land to the overreaching of an encroaching neighbor, or the threats of a lawless trespasser? What American citizen will consent that Oregon shall be yielded, either to the cunning diplomacy or the arrogant assumptions of Great Britain?

THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF OREGON TO THE UNITED STATES.

The doctrine maintained by the Democracy is, that *Great Britain should not be allowed to advance another of her gigantic steps upon the American hemisphere.* But it is not only in a political point of view that the American occupation of Oregon is important. The value and advantages of that vast region are incalculable, and are not sufficiently estimated by the people. A brief selection from volumes of material will show the richness of the prize England is trying to wrest from us.

THE CLIMATE.

The climate, soil, trade, hunting, fishing, capability of defence, safe and capacious harbors, and general resources, render this vast region one of the most desirable portions of the New World.

Cook, Dixon, Pontlock, Vancouver, Kotzebue, Lewis and Clarke, and all other explorers, represent the climate of the northwest coast of America as exceedingly mild, pleasant, and salubrious. Even to the northward of Cape Prince of Wales, latitude 71° , Kotzebue says that, on the 30th of July, a long tract of low land was covered with luxuriant verdure. Cook describes the climate, from March to April, in latitude $49^{\circ} 30'$, as infinitely milder than that on the coast of America under the same latitude. There was no frost in the low grounds, and vegetation proceeded briskly; grass, at this time, was upwards of a foot long.

"The climate south of 53 degrees, assumes a mildness, (says Mr. Prevost, in 1822,) unknown in the same latitude on the eastern side of the continent. The mercury, during the winter, seldom descends below the freezing point. The rains usually commence with November, and continue to fall partially until April. A benign spring succeeds; and when the summer heats obtain, they are so tempered with showers as seldom to suspend vegetation. It was luxuriant on the first of October. High mountains form the coast, arresting the vapors of the ocean, which produces, in the interior, a climate of uncommon mildness. Between this mountainous ridge along the coast, and the chain of mountains which cross the Oregon, lies the rich valley of the Columbia. For several hundred miles in length, and fifty in width, the country is a high level plain, in all its parts extremely fertile. Nearly the whole of this wide-spread tract, in May, was covered with a profusion of grass and plants, amongst them a variety of esculent plants and roots, yielding nutritious and agreeable food. In short, this district, though elevated several thousand feet above the level of the ocean, possesses pure and dry air, with a climate milder than the same latitude in the Atlantic States, and equally healthy; and, if properly cultivated, would yield every object necessary for the subsistence and comfort of civilized man."

The country between the lowest falls on the Columbia river and the ocean, is rich in soil, well timbered and watered, and capable of any species of culture.

The coast, latitude $49^{\circ} 14'$, presents a vast luxuriant landscape; the more interior parts, somewhat elevated and agreeably diversified with hills, from which the land gradually descends to the shore, and terminates in a sandy beach. The ocean teems with otter, seal, and the whale, while the main land abounds in every variety of game, and the waters with salmon, sturgeon, and other species of fish; and all grains and tuberous plants may be cultivated with advantage. The multitudes of salmon in the Oregon are inconceivable; and they extend to its remotest sources. The water is so clear, that they may be seen at the depth of fifteen or twenty feet; so abundant are they, at certain seasons, that, in the scarcity of wood, dried fish are often used as fuel.

Of other sections of this great country, it is said, "the serenity of the climate, the innumerable pleasing landscapes, and the abundant fertility that unassisted nature puts forth, require only to be enriched by the industry of man with villages, mansions, cottages, and other buildings, to render it the most lovely country that can be imagined; whilst the labor of the inhabitants would be amply rewarded in the bounties which nature seems ready to bestow on cultivation."

In a word, that great peninsula, between the mouth of the Columbia and the entrance of De Fuca's strait, enclosing more than two-thirds of the country on the ocean between the river and the straits, possesses advantages for occupation by a civilized nation not surpassed by those of any other country in the world.

Such are the advantages of this favored region, that all who have examined the subject are well satisfied that it might be defended against exterior and internal enemies, at a small expense and readily subsisted from its own resources.

In a letter of Governor Pelby, of the Hudson Bay Company, to the British Colonial Secretary

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of State, the 1st of February, 1837, the climate, soil, and other circumstances) the country, are represented to be as well adapted (if not better) to agricultural pursuits, as any other spot in America. The company are establishing an export trade in wool, tallow, hides, and agricultural produce; and are fast bringing into culture large pasture and grain farms, by the settlement of their retired servants, and the protection they afford to their own emigrants. In this correspondence, which is disclosed in the able speech of Mr. Buchanan, in the United States Senate, Mr. Simpson, the superintendent of the company affairs, says:

"The possession of that country to Great Britain may become an object of very great importance, and we are strengthening their claim to it (independent of the claim of prior discovery and occupation for the purpose of Indian trade) by forming the nucleus of a colony, through the establishment of farms, and the settlement of some of our retiring officers and servants as agriculturists."

CAPACITIES FOR TRADE AND COMMERCE.

The undeveloped capacities of this vast region for commerce and trade, can hardly be estimated. The whale fishery and the fur trade offer unexhausted resources for these hardy pursuits, the great nurseries of seamen. Even the northern seas and the coasts of Japan, are visited by the Nantucket and New Bedford whalers, in pursuit of their receding game, while the superior advantages that would be enjoyed in this business, from a proper exploration, and the necessary protection to our whale fishery on the vast shores of the northwest coast, which is represented to be thronged with whales, is placed beyond the reach of our daring navigators, and in danger of being wrested from us by the grasping acquisitiveness of Great Britain. In their recent correspondence with the Home government, the Hudson Bay Company boast that every American whaler will be driven from this coast.

If commerce, manufactures, and trade, combined with the impulse they give to agriculture, would seek a new and vast expansion of resources and consumption, here is the great and inexhaustible field for the attention of the enterprise and industry of the people of the United States, and especially of its Atlantic manufacturing and commercial sections, which have an incalculably greater pecuniary interest in the question of American rights in Oregon than the Southern and Western States.

Mr. Baylies, of Massachusetts, chairman of a committee of Congress, in 1826, in an able report to the House, (which, however, fell unheeded upon the then dull ear of the public,) thus happily described the capacities of this mighty region:

"A vast river, with its tributaries and branches, waters its whole extent, through seven degrees of latitude, and penetrates beyond into the territories of other nations.

"It abounds in excellent timber and in spars, unsurpassed by any in the world.

"Its waters are navigable for vessels through half its extent, and for boats through half the remainder.

"The water power, for moving manufacturing machinery, is unequalled, and commences where the navigation terminates.

"It is bounded on the south by a country abounding in cattle and wheat, which can be reached by sea in less than ten days, and in the vicinity, too, of other countries whose interior is filled with the precious metals, and the richest articles of commerce, and whose shores abound in the pearl-producing oyster.

"It is within twenty days' sail of the coasts of Peru and Chili, which are indented with fine bays and harbors, but destitute of the materials of ship building, which they would receive from this source, that could supply the materials at the cheapest rate.

"It is within seventy or eighty days' sail of China and the East Indian seas, and within thirty of the Sandwich Islands, abounding in sandal wood, in the sugar cane, and tropical fruits, and perfectly adapted to the culture of coffee and cotton.

"On one side it approaches a country where coal in prodigious quantities has already been discovered, and on the other, the borders of a sea which, for the space of seventy-six degrees, is seldom ruffled by a storm, and which can be traversed by steam, in every direction.

"The advantages, great as they now are, will be trifling in comparison to what they will be, whenever a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, through the isthmus dividing North and South America, shall have been effected."

In a word, "If it were given to a civilized, commercial and manufacturing people, 'where to choose their place of rest,' the world affords no position equal to this, and it requires no prophetic spirit to foresee the wealth and grandeur of that fortunate race, whose happy destiny shall have placed their ancestors in this beautiful region."

These are the advantages which England, in her grasping ambition, seeks to make her own. Her plans are hinted at by one of her agents, Sir Alexander McKensie, in his *Travels*, and they are silently and steadily pursued by the progress of the Hudson Bay Company. Mr. McKensie says:

"By opening the intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and forming regular establishments through the interior, and at both extremes, the entire command of the fur trade of North America might be obtained, from latitude 38 degrees north to the pole. To this may be added the fishery in both seas, and the markets of the four quarters of the globe. Such would be the field for commercial enterprise, and incalculable would be the produce of it when supported by the operations of that credit and capital which Great Britain so eminently possesses." And this, the writer adds, is to be followed by the complete exclusion of Americans from the country.

And to all these advantages, is to be added the obvious fact, developed by the facilities of steam communication, which now reckons contiguity by time in transition, and not by distance, that Oregon may be brought nearer to the heart of this Union, than was Louisiana when annexed by Mr. Jefferson. And through this medium may be opened a great thoroughfare to China and the commerce of the East.

Such is the value of this possession. Such is the importance of the commercial question, whether England shall usurp, or we enjoy our own.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN TITLE TO OREGON?

The claims of the United States to title are briefly these: In May, 1792, Captain Robert Gray, of Boston, in the ship *Columbia*, made the first discovery of the mouth of the great river of Oregon, which he named after his vessel. In 1804, Lewis and Clark, in an expedition recommended by Thomas Jefferson, explored this river from its source to the Pacific ocean, and took possession in behalf of the United States. In 1810, John Jacob Astor sent out a colony, and planted three establishments in the territory. This was the first settlement and actual occupancy by any civilized people.

In the war with Great Britain, these posts were taken possession of by Great Britain, and, by the treaty of Ghent, they were surrendered back to the United States unconditionally—Great Britain thus acknowledging the title to be in the United States.

The American title, therefore, is founded on priority of discovery, followed by actual occupation; on the virtual recognition by the British Government, of the title of the United States, in 1818, up to which time, and long after, we never heard of any claim to the territory on the part of Great Britain; on the subsequent acquisition by the United States of all the titles of Spain to the Northwest coast, by the Florida treaty in 1819, and the transferred titles and claims of France, through its extension of the Louisiana territory; and, lastly, upon the ground of *contiguity*, which, of itself, should give to the United States a stronger right to those territories, as unoccupied country, than could be advanced by any other power.

Great Britain founds her claim, first, on the commercial treaty with Spain in 1790, which has but a remote bearing on the question, and which was abrogated by war between the two nations, before Spain transferred her title to the United States; and, second, by pretended priority of discovery of the *Columbia* river. But the only evidence on which this rests is, the exploring of a portion of the Northwest coast by Lieutenant Meares, in 1788, who, so far from discovering or suspecting the existence of the great river of the West, gave to the cape and the Bay of *Columbia* the names of Cape Disappointment and Deception Bay; which attest his failure.

"It has been thus established, (says Mr. Gallatin, in his conference with the British Plenipotentiaries in 1827,) that the *Columbia* river was first discovered by the United States; that the first discovery was attended by a complete exploration of the river, before any such exploration had been made by any other nation; by a simultaneous actual occupation and possession, and by subsequent settlements made within a reasonable time, which have been interrupted only by the casualties of war. And this, it is contended, gives to the United States, according to the acknowledged law and usages of nations, a right to the whole country drained by that river and its tributary streams. And these, strengthened by the transfer of the Spanish and French claims, establish, it is firmly believed, a stronger title to the country than has ever, at any former time, been asserted by any nation to vacant territory."—20th Congress, 1st sess. Doc. No. 199, House of Reps.

The validity of the American title, thus established, has never been doubted or questioned by any American President, Minister, Congress, or Committee, except that it was tampered with by Mr. Clay, who, when Secretary of State, in 1826, offered to yield to Great Britain one-third of our rights. It was affirmed by Jefferson, in 1804, and has been insisted on by every President since. Even when Mr. Adams as President, and Mr. Clay as Secretary, in 1826, proposed to yield a portion of our claim by a compromise—to adopt the 49th degree of latitude as the boundary, which would have surrendered about one-third of the American claim—the claims of Great Britain, then first formally presented, were regarded as new and extraordinary; nor did they "raise any doubts in the mind of the President, of the strength and solidity of our title."—Mr. Clay to Mr. Gallatin, February 24, 1827.

All the reports of Committees of Congress, from 1822 till now, have maintained the validity

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of the title beyond the reach of everything but British pretensions, founded on the smallest cavils and quibbles of British diplomacy. The committee in 1828 say: "They have come to the conclusion that the United States have an incontestable claim to this coast, from the forty-second parallel of latitude, north, nearly to the mouth of the Strait of De Fuca; and that they have a better title than any other nation to the countries watered by the Strait of De Fuca, and the waters themselves." And they also say, that, "after a careful examination of the British claim, the committee have come to the conclusion that it is wholly unfounded."—19th Congress, 1st sess. *House of Reps.* No. 213.

This has been reiterated and reaffirmed by additional proofs, in the reports of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 25th Congress, 3d session, No. 101, House of Reps.; and the Committee on Military Affairs, by Mr. Pendleton of Ohio, 27th Congress, 2d sess. No. 830, House of Reps.; and in the able speeches in the Senate, the present and the preceding sessions of Congress.

In all the discussions in Congress, no man who denied the expediency of extending our laws over Oregon, ever doubted our right and the validity of our title. In the Senate, January 12, 1843, Mr. Sevier of Arkansas, said, with the assent of every Senator, "it was gratifying to find that every Senator conceded the point that our right to the territory was incontestable; that question had been well settled."

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO MAINTAIN THIS RIGHT?

Absolutely nothing by the Government. In 1806, a trifling sum was appropriated for the expenses of the expedition of Lewis and Clark; and from that down to 1826, and till now, not a single rifleman has been supported at the public expense, to protect American citizens in the settlements on their own soil. In the mean time, Great Britain has cautiously continued to develop her plan to check and control all nations, and especially her great commercial and manufacturing rival, the United States, by means of her navy, her commerce, and, above all, in these days, by her wily diplomacy.

Mr. Jefferson, to whom we owe Louisiana, in his message to Congress, January 18, 1803, and in his enlarged views of American rights, recommended the exploration of the Northwest coast, on the express ground of its being territory of the United States. This was followed by the celebrated expedition of Lewis and Clark.

The Government did no more till 1815, when she demanded of Great Britain the restoration, under the 1st article of the treaty of Ghent, of Astoria, in Oregon. Here was the time for England to have set up her title, if she had any. This colony, settled by a private citizen (John Jacob Astor) in 1810, had been transferred, during the war in 1813, to avoid plunder, to the British Northwest Fur Company of Canada, and was soon after taken possession of by the British sloop of war *Rackoon*, sent out expressly for that hostile purpose. The British hoisted their flag, and changed the name of the principal post from Astoria to Fort George.

By the first article of the treaty of Ghent, "restitution was to be made to the United States of all posts and places whatsoever, taken from them by the British." The British Government demurred to this demand till the 6th of October, 1818. But the American Government was resolute in the demand, and England had not then forgotten the lessons taught her by young America, on the ocean, the lakes, and, above all, at New Orleans. Will this proud nation never learn justice but when taught it by stripes?

The article of surrender reads thus: "In conformity to the first article of the treaty of Ghent, we, the undersigned, restore to the Government of the United States the settlement of Fort George, on the river Columbia."

And now the great robber-nation claims this very territory as her own, upon a pretence of fabulous purchase; a false story of discovery; an annulled treaty with Spain; and a miserable tale of a miserable priest, one John Harris, whose compilation of imaginary travels is discredited by their own historians, and by all contemporary and subsequent authors; and this pretension, as all other British pretensions have ever been, is favored, if not sanctioned, by that party which has been essentially British ever since the declaration of independence, and who, if they get the control of negotiation for the next four years, are prepared, under the pretended fear of war, to surrender the Northwestern, as they have the Northeastern boundary, to British cupidity and cunning. Mr. Clay began this surrender, and laid the first foundation of British assumption, in his negotiations of 1827; and will he be less yielding now?

THE PROGRESS OF BRITISH PRETENSIONS TO OREGON.

Great Britain, it is seen, virtually recognised the American title by her formal act of surrender October 6, 1818; but in the same month (October 20, 1818,) began her policy of keeping the question of settlement in abeyance, that she might first assume, and then assert, a groundless title. By the 3d article of the treaty of London, of that date, it was agreed that the country on the Northwest coast of America, claimed by either party, should be open to both for ten years, with-

out prejudice to the claim of either. In 1827, Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay, then in the administration, offered to give to Great Britain all north of forty-nine degrees. But this offer of a part, only made her greedy for more; and a long negotiation ended in the renewal, in 1827, of the above agreement, subject to be annulled at any time after a year's notice by either party.

Great Britain here began to set up her pretensions, which have been growing ever since; but it was no direct claim. "Great Britain (said her negotiators in 1826) *claims no exclusive sovereignty over any portion of that territory.* Her present claim, not to any part, but to the whole, is limited to a right of joint occupancy in common with other states, leaving the right of exclusive dominion in abeyance."

And there it was suffered to rest by Mr. Clay, in 1826; and from that nest-egg, as has been aptly said, has been hatched the chicken that now flaps its wings and crows over the empire corporation, which England is cherishing in Oregon, to emulate, one day, in the West, the power of her empire corporation in the East.

With Russia, the only other power in that region, we have a treaty not to extend her settlements south of her acknowledged line. But Great Britain keeps the question of dominion in "abeyance," and continues to encroach, while she continues to negotiate, and while the leaders of the Whig party in the Senate of the United States, following the policy of Mr. Clay, in 1826, coolly say that, "if we have waited so quietly for twenty-six years, for the adjustment of this question, they do not see why we should not wait longer."

And their remedy against the encroachments of Great Britain, who never turns her foot back till driven, is, to wait "twenty years longer, when an agricultural population from the United States will peaceably have spread itself over the territory, and the hunters of the Hudson Bay Company will all pass off to the desert."

"The controversy is not urgent," was the language of those who opposed action in the present Congress with reference to Oregon; and this has been their language ever since Mr. Clay's proposed concession in 1826; and when a committee of the House of Representatives said, with a truth which has been constantly accumulating in force from that day to this, that "the indifference of America stimulates the cupidity of Great Britain. Our neglect daily weakens our own claim, and strengthens hers; and the day will soon arrive, when her title to this territory will be better than ours, unless ours is earnestly and speedily enforced."

This, then, is the question for the American people, in regard to the national policy as to this vast and invaluable possession. It is a question of national security, whether Great Britain shall circumvent our whole continent.

It is a question of national commerce, whether Great Britain shall monopolize the vast resources of that region, and exclude our hunters and traders and whalers from the soil and the coast.

And it is a question of national protection to the hardy pioneers, who, in the faith that their country would not claim a soil she should fail to shelter under the wings of her eagle, have settled in that region, and demand the name of an American citizen should, on American soil, be the guaranty of American rights.

THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY AND THE JOINT OCCUPANCY.

Great Britain concedes to us the joint occupancy of the Oregon; but, like the joint occupancy of the hedge-hog and the rabbit, the power to annoy is all on her side.

In 1821, she leased this whole territory to her great territorial corporation, the Hudson Bay Company, for twenty-one years. In 1838, it was extended another twenty-one years. They have already an armed force of some thousands, with six stockade forts, and a marine of six armed vessels, and they are confident that British influence may be maintained as paramount in this interesting part of the coast of the Pacific.

Already they have murdered between four and five hundred of our citizens, who went to Oregon peaceably to share this right of joint occupancy; and in pursuance of the same policy that marked her course toward the North American colonies, England has refused to stipulate with us for the neutrality of the savages, that she may stir up against our citizens in that region.

Great Britain is thus colonizing, by means of her empire corporation, while our institutions will not admit of the use of like means; and while a party in this country hold that the treaty of joint occupancy will not allow us to extend the shield of our laws over our own citizens, she has gone on and attached the whole territory to the province of Canada, appointed justices of the peace, and now administers her laws throughout the country. And

WHAT HAS THE UNITED STATES DONE TO PROTECT HER SETTLERS?

Literally nothing. In 1839, a memorial from Massachusetts showed that three thousand New England emigrants were prepared to proceed to the Oregon, if they could be assured that they

* Speech of Mr. Choate, of Massachusetts, in the Senate, March, 1844.

would there enjoy the protection of the laws of the United States. Repeated attempts to extend the protection of our laws over Oregon have been made, since that period, and failed. In 1843, a bill to that effect passed the Senate, by the votes of Democratic Senators, but it went no further; and in 1844, a resolve, in the same body, to give notice to Great Britain of our intention to annul the treaty of 1827, was lost by Whig votes.

It is now a great question for the great American people. They will deprecate war, as a great evil; but they will not surrender great rights for fear of war. We agree with the British minister, Mr. Huskisson, in 1838, that "it would be lamentable that, in this age, two such nations as the United States and Great Britain, should be drawn to a rupture on such a subject as the uncultivated wilds of the Northwest coast;" but the American people will also agree with the American Senator, who has said, on this subject, that "a firm, determined spirit, is always necessary to obtain from Great Britain respect and justice."

And when they look at and appreciate this vast interest, in its relations to the great mission of this country to extend, by all rightful means, the area of freedom, until liberty shall become the inheritance of the North American continent, they will respond, with an American heart, to the Mississippi resolve, "That it is the duty of the Government to protect our citizens wherever they may lawfully be, to the fullest extent, in the rights of property and all the privileges which appertain to citizens of the United States."

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF A COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS
OF CONGRESS.

[50 Cents per Hundred.]